

Report from NATO Summit in Newport, Wales, 4-5 Sept 2014

Disbanding NATO would be the alternative

On September 4-5 in the normally peaceful little Welsh city of Newport, the latest NATO Summit took place, more than two years after the last summit in Chicago in May 2012.

Once again we saw the same images: vast areas sealed off, no-traffic and no-fly zones, and schools and shops being forced to shut. Safely shielded in their 5-star Celtic Manor Hotel resort, the “old and new warriors” held their meetings in surroundings far removed from the living and working realities of the region’s inhabitants – and far removed from any protests, too. In fact, the reality was better described as a “state of emergency”, with security measures costing some 70 million euros.

Despite the familiar scenes, there were actually new aspects to be greeted. The local population were obviously sympathetic to the cause of the protests. One of the main slogans attracted particular support – “Welfare instead of warfare” – since it resonates strongly with the wishes of many in a region characterised by unemployment and lack of future perspectives.

Another unusual and remarkable aspect was the committed, cooperative and non-aggressive behaviour of the police. With no signs of tension and, in fact, with a friendly approach, they accompanied a protest right up to the conference hotel and helped make it possible for a delegation of demonstrators to hand over to the “NATO bureaucrats” a large package of protest notes.

Agenda of the NATO Summit

According to the invitation letter from the outgoing NATO General Secretary Rasmussen, the following issues were priorities during the discussions:

- a. the situation in Afghanistan after the end of the ISAF mandate and NATO’s continued support for the developments in the country
- b. the future role and mission of NATO
- c. the crisis in Ukraine and the relationship with Russia
- d. the current situation in Iraq.

The crisis in and around the Ukraine, which would better be described as finalising the details of a new collision course with Russia, had become the clear focal point during the run-up to the summit, since NATO sees this as an opportunity to justify its continued existence and resume a “leading role”. A debate on the strategies and the relations to Russia, including the whole issue of “smart defence”, thus culminated in a debate on the consequences to be drawn from the Ukraine crisis.

Eastern Europe, Ukraine and Russia

During the summit this led to the approval of an action plan to increase security relating to the crisis in the Ukraine. An Eastern Europe “very high readiness force” or “spearhead” of some 3-5,000 troops will be formed, which will be deployable within a few days. If Britain and Poland get their way, the force’s HQ will be in Szczecin, Poland. As outgoing NATO General Secretary Rasmussen put it: “*And it sends a clear message to any potential aggressor: should you even think of attacking one Ally, you will be facing the whole Alliance.*”

The forces will have several bases, including several in the Baltic countries, with permanent detachments of 300-600 soldiers. This is surely a breach of the Founding Act on Mutual Relations, Cooperation and Security which NATO and Russia signed in 1997.

According to Rasmussen, the crisis in Ukraine is a “crucial point” in the history of NATO, which is now 65 years old. “As we remember the devastation of World War One, our peace and security are once again being tested, now by Russia’s aggression against Ukraine.” ... “And the criminal downing of Flight MH17 has made clear that a conflict in one part of Europe can have tragic consequences around the world.”

Some NATO countries, especially new members from Eastern Europe, were pleading for the 1997 NATO-Russia Founding Treaty to be cancelled on the grounds that Russia has breached it. This was rejected by other members.

The UK and USA want to station hundreds of soldiers in eastern Europe. Even before the summit, the British *Times* reported that troops and armoured divisions are to be sent “frequently” on exercises to Poland and the Baltic countries during the coming year. The newspaper saw this as a sign of NATO’s determination not to be “intimidated” by the annexation of Crimea and destabilisation of Ukraine. The plan of action which was decided upon foresees more combat force exercises in various countries and the creation of new permanent military bases in eastern Europe. These manoeuvres will prepare the alliance’s “spearhead” (Rasmussen) for its new tasks. The next “rapid trident” is planned for September 15-26, 2014, in the western part of Ukraine. Participants will be NATO countries, Ukraine, Moldavia and Georgia. The bases needed for the action plan will probably be in the three Baltic countries, Poland and Romania.

Ukraine, whose President Poroshenko took part in some of the summit, will also receive further support to modernise their army with regards to logistics and its command structure. Decisions as to support in the form of direct arms deliveries were left to individual NATO members.

The building up of a “missile defence system” will also be continued.

More money for armament

Implementing these plans costs money. In the run-up to the summit, the NATO General Secretary declared, “I urge every Ally to give increased priority to defence. As European economies recover from the economic crisis, so too should our investment in defence.” The (old) benchmark of having each NATO member invest 2% of its GDP in armaments was revived. Or at least, as Chancellor Merkel remarked, military expenditure should not be reduced.

With a view to the crisis in eastern Europe, NATO warned of the risks associated with further cuts and insisted that Germany increase its spending. According to the German current affairs magazine *Der Spiegel*, a confidential NATO document for the member states' defence ministers reports that “*entire areas of capability [would have to be] abandoned or substantially reduced*” if defence spending is cut any further, since years of cuts have led to a dramatic thinning out in the armed forces. Without the contribution of the USA, the paper continues, the alliance would have a considerably restricted capacity to carry out operations.

So now the pressure is increasing, particularly on Germany, to increase defence expenditure. According to internal NATO rankings, in 2014 Germany will be in 14th place with its military expenditure at 1.29 per cent of its GDP. Economically speaking, Germany is the second strongest country in the alliance after the USA.

Since Germany has announced its intention to enact a more active foreign and security policy, this also needs to find its expression in financial terms, according to NATO commanders. “*There will be*

increasing pressure to do more to protect the eastern European NATO members,” said the defence policy spokesperson of the CDU/CDU fraction in Germany, Henning Otte. *“This can also mean we have to adapt our defence budget to meet the new political developments,”* he continued.

This new round of arms spending will have more social victims. The fact that Chancellor Merkel very cautiously avoided any specific promises on behalf of the German government was certainly due to the domestic political situation. In spite of the recent beating of the war drums, the German population has remained decidedly resistant to the idea of further armament and more military manoeuvres.

According to SIPRI figures, in 2014 the ratio of NATO military expenditure to Russian is still 9:1.

An ever more military way of thinking

During the summit, a noticeably (even frighteningly) aggressive tone and wording could be heard when it came to Russia, who has been declared an “enemy” again. This image was created by the polarisation and cheap accusations characterising the summit. The political leaders present could constantly be heard asserting that “Russia is to blame for the crisis in Ukraine”, contrary to the facts that even they know about. There was a complete lack of criticism, or even reflective consideration. And the press attending also gave their almost unanimous support, regardless which country they were from.

Terms such as “common security” or “détente” were not welcome; it was a summit of confrontation setting a course for war. This approach seemed to completely ignore any possible easing of the situation with a ceasefire or the restart of negotiations in the Ukraine. There was only one possible strategy: confrontation.

Iraq

Another important role at the summit was played by the crisis in Iraq. During the gathering, President Obama declared that several NATO states were forming a “new coalition of the willing” to combat the IS in Iraq. According to the US Secretary of Defense Chuck Hagel, these are the USA, UK, Australia, Canada, Denmark, France, Germany, Italy, Poland and Turkey. They are hoping to be joined by further members. The deployment of ground troops is still being ruled out for the current situation, but there will be expanded use of airstrikes using both manned aircraft and drones as well as arms deliveries to local allies. A comprehensive plan to combat the IS is due to be proposed to the UN General Assembly meeting later in September. Exports of weapons and other arms are to be continued.

Here, too, pressure on Germany is increasing for it to take part in the intervention with its own planes (modernised Tornados with GBU 54 weapons).

The NATO leaders exhibited a military way of thinking in which there is no place for any of the alternative ways to combat the IS currently being suggested by peace researchers or the peace movement.

NATO expansion

Another point on the agenda was the long-term ambition to admit new members, especially Ukraine, Moldova and Georgia. Promises were made to them, as well as to Jordan and provisionally also Libya, to provide support for the “reform of the defence and security sector”.

For Georgia, a “substantial package of measures” was agreed which should lead the country towards NATO membership.

Regarding Ukraine, Prime Minister Yatsenyuk had proposed immediate admission but this was not agreed. It seems that NATO still considers the risks to be too high. There is another country that has a tangible hope of becoming a member: Montenegro. A decision will be made in 2015 regarding its admission.

Another interesting development was the expansion of cooperation with two neutral nations: Finland and Sweden. They are to be integrated even more closely into NATO's structures regarding infrastructure and command. An agreement called "Host NATO Support" allows NATO to include both countries in manoeuvres in northern Europe.

Before the summit there were also reports revealing how the alliance's sphere of influence is also being extended further towards Asia by means of "Partnerships for Peace", bringing the Philippines, Indonesia, Kazakhstan, Japan and even Vietnam into NATO's sights. It is obvious how China could be encircled. For the first time, Japan has also designated a permanent representative to the NATO headquarters.

And the further expansion of NATO's influence towards Central Africa was also on the agenda.

The situation in Afghanistan

The failure of NATO's military involvement in Afghanistan is generally relegated to the background (by the press but also by many in the peace movement). Another manipulated election with the warlords' preferred victors (regardless of who becomes president), a completely unstable domestic political situation, starvation and poverty all characterise life in this long-suffering country. The main actors responsible for most of this are the USA and NATO. A complete withdrawal is not planned but rather the ratification of a new occupation treaty, which President Karzai no longer wanted to sign. This would allow international troop contingents of approximately 10,000 soldiers to remain (including up to 800 German armed forces members). The "comprehensive approach" will also be intensified, i.e. civil-military co-operation. And the politics that have so clearly failed will be pursued further. Those that suffer will continue to be the general population in the country who are being robbed of any chance to see an independent, self-determined development in their country – which would also help them to overcome the criminal structures of the warlords. The obvious affinity of both winning parties in the election for the USA and NATO will hinder an independent, peaceful development.

So it still remains true to say: Peace in Afghanistan is yet to be achieved. Cooperation between all forces for peace in Afghanistan and the international peace movement needs to be developed further. We should not allow ourselves to forget Afghanistan: it remains a vital challenge for the peace movements after 35 years of war (including 13 years of NATO war).

No peace with NATO

So the peace movement has enough reasons to demonstrate against these policies of confrontation, armament, "demonising" the so-called enemy, and further NATO expansion to the East. The very institution whose policies are significantly responsible for the crisis and civil war is seeking to suck out of them the lifeblood needed for its further existence.

Once again, the NATO Summit in 2014 has shown: For peace' sake, there will be no peace with NATO. The alliance deserves to be abolished and replaced with a system of joint collective security and disarmament.

Actions organised by the international peace movement

Initiated by the international network “No to war – No to NATO”, providing critical coverage of a NATO summit for the fourth time, and with strong support from the British peace movement in the form of the “Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament (CND)” and the “Stop the War Coalition”, a diverse range of peace events and actions took place.

The main events were:

- An international demonstration in Newport on September 30, 2104. With c. 3000 participants it was the largest demonstration the city has seen in the past 20 years, but still too small to really be satisfying considering the current situation in the world. Speakers from trade unions, politics and the international peace movement were all agreed in their clear opposition to war and in favour of disarmament, and with regard to the need to subject the whole idea of NATO to renegotiation.
- An international counter-summit took place in Cardiff city hall on August 31 with the support of the local council, and on September 1 in Newport. This counter-summit was supported with funding and staff by the Rosa Luxemburg Foundation. It successfully managed to achieve two goals: firstly, a detailed analysis of the international situation, and secondly, the formulation of political alternatives and options for action within the peace movement. At the counter-summit, feminist criticism of NATO militarisation played a particularly intensive role. All the events were carried out in an atmosphere of express solidarity and surely form the foundations for stronger future cooperation in the international peace movement. The number of participants was also very pleasing at around 300.
- An international peace camp in a beautifully situated park at the edge of Newport’s inner city. In particular, younger participants in the protest actions found space here for lively discussions, with 200 people attending the camp.
- A demonstration procession on the first day of the summit attracted lots of positive attention from the media and the local population, with around 500 participants bringing the protest right to the front doors of the summit venue. For the first time, a thick package of protest resolutions could be handed over to the NATO bureaucrats (who remained nameless and faceless).

Once again, there proved to be great media interest in the counter events. Welsh print and online media carried intensive coverage, and the British press also provided comprehensive reporting. The German broadcasters ARD and ZDF showed images from the protest actions and the left-wing press in Germany also covered the counter-summit.

All of the protest events occurred absolutely peacefully, without any violence. Of course, this was due mainly to the protestors themselves, but happily the British police contributed to this achievement as well thanks to their cooperative and low-key behaviour.

Especially at the counter-summit, the debates once again documented the fundamental difference between aggressive NATO policies and strategies that would bring about peace. So this summit in particular has proven the need to continue delegitimizing NATO.

The creative potential of the peace movement was continued during further meetings where future activities were agreed upon:

- International Drones Meeting on Saturday, August 30, 2014. One of the topics discussed was the preparation of the Global Day of Action on Drones for October 4, 2014. It was also agreed to work towards an international congress on drones for May 2015.
- International meeting to prepare actions for the 2015 Review Conference for the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons in New York in April/May. Topics discussed included

the program for the two-day Congress Against Nuclear Weapons and Defence Expenditure, the fringe events during the UN meeting, and a large demonstration in the city.

- The Annual Meeting of the “No to war – no to NATO” network on September 2, 2014. This network, whose meetings are supported by the Rosa Luxemburg Foundation, can now look back at a successful counter-program to four NATO summits. It can justifiably claim to have brought the delegitimization of NATO back onto the peace movement’s agenda and to some degree into wider political discourse as well. It will continue these activities in 2015, including two events on the role of NATO in northern Europe and in the Balkans.

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